
Texas Department of Health

The Commissioner's Report to the Board of Health

July 1, 2004

Hot Topics



Lead levels in Mexican candy within acceptable range

TDH laboratory tests for lead in 38 candy and snack products imported from Mexico that contain powdered chili found no lead levels that exceeded federally established regulatory standards. Of the 38 products tested, small amounts of lead were found in 11, but all were below a 0.5 parts-per-million (or milligrams-per-kilogram) maximum acceptable level established by the U.S. Food and Drug Administration. TDH also tested product wrappers for lead content and found that some wrappers had elevated levels of lead that did not appear to affect the lead levels in the products themselves. TDH and the FDA are continuing to monitor. The issue of lead in some Mexican candy and snack products that contain powdered chili arose in California in March. *For more information, contact Frank Borden, Manufactured Foods Division, at (512) 719-0243 or e-mail frank.borden@tdh.state.tx.us; or contact Dwight Schaeper, TDH Laboratory, Environmental Sciences Division, at (512) 458-7857 or e-mail dwight.schaeper@tdh.state.tx.us.*



CSHCN benefits available for 997 special-needs children now off waiting list

The families of 997 special-needs children received good news recently when they received letters informing them that their children had been removed from the waiting list for Children with Special Health Care Needs services. After ongoing review of the CSHCN projected expenditures in relation to available funds, TDH developed a plan to provide health-care benefits to the 997 child clients. Letters were mailed May 24 notifying the clients and their families that, as of May 1, the CSHCN program will cover their health-care benefits. Of the 997 clients, 226 are in the highest-priority group for removal from the waiting list as they are children under the age of 21 with an urgent need for health-care benefits. *For more information, contact Sam Cooper, CSHCN Division, at (512) 458-7111, ext. 1-3104, or e-mail sam.cooper@tdh.state.tx.us.*



Two cases of measles in Mexico prompt HAN advisory

As a precaution, the Immunization Division issued a Health Alert Network (HAN) advisory to remind physicians and other medical-care professionals to be watchful for suspect cases of measles, especially along the border. The advisory was prompted by two recent cases of measles reported from Acuña and Torreón in the border state of Coahuila. Acuña is adjacent to Del Rio. Mexico has recorded 64 cases of measles this year and had 44 cases in 2003. Texas has had no measles cases this year or last year. *For more information, contact Rita Espinoza, Immunization Division, Surveillance and Epidemiology Program, at (512) 458-7111, ext. 1-6634, or e-mail rita.espinoza@tdh.state.tx.us.*



Conference on preventing teen pregnancy set for August

TDH and the Center for Health Training will host a conference on teen-pregnancy prevention Aug. 19-20 in Austin entitled “Texas Partnership for Teen Pregnancy Prevention: Talk Early ... Talk Often ... Stay Involved!” Community leaders, elected officials, current agency contractors, and other policy experts will seek common ground in addressing teen-pregnancy prevention and in improving the health status of youth in Central Texas. The event will include participants from Public Health Region 7 and Bexar County. Featured topics include national teen-pregnancy trends and data; the impact of media messages on the adolescent brain; a discussion by a panel of teens on issues facing teens; and a presentation by a Texas coalition that overcame obstacles, discovered common ground, and reduced teen pregnancy in their community. *For more information, contact Cindy Jones, Family Planning Division, at (512) 458-7796 or e-mail cindy.jones@tdh.state.tx.us.*



EBT system launched for WIC clients in El Paso

On June 1, TDH’s WIC Program launched its Electronic Benefits Transfer (EBT) pilot to deliver client benefits by use of an off-line smart card in El Paso. The EBT system was installed and certified, and is operating, at all 84 contracted grocer locations in El Paso. Both local clinics operated by Centro de Salud Familiar La Fe are participating and issuing cards to their caseload of approximately 2,000 clients. Phase II of the pilot starts July 1, when the larger of the two sponsoring local agencies, the El Paso City-County Health District, will begin issuing cards to a caseload of 47,000 clients at its 16 clinic locations. *For more information, contact Ray Krzesniak, EBT Planning Division, at (512) 458-7111, ext. 3471, or e-mail ray.krzesniak@tdh.state.tx.us.*



Start-up funds granted to 2 contractors for school-based health centers

Two new contractors have been selected to receive start-up grant funding for fiscal year 2005 to establish model school-based health centers that deliver conventional primary and preventive health services and related social services to a school-age population on a school campus. The TDH Adolescent and School Health Program announced the awards on June 1. Each of the two new contractors, the La Marque Independent School District in Galveston County and the Tornillo Independent School District in El Paso County, will receive a maximum of \$125,000 for the first year of a three-year project term. *For more information, contact John Dillard, Adolescent and School Health Program, at (512) 458-7111, ext. 1-2782, or e-mail john.dillard@tdh.state.tx.us.*



FQHC Look-Alike certifications and FQHC applications

The Project Vida Health Center in El Paso and the Georgetown Community Clinic were recently certified as FQHC Look-Alikes, which means that they meet all of the requirements of an FQHC and receive cost-based reimbursement, but they do not receive an FQHC grant. This certification increases their competitiveness for FQHC grant funds.

Below is the list of applications for FQHC funding that were submitted recently:

FQHC New Access Point applications, submitted June 18, for urban areas:

- Forth Ward Clinic-Good Neighbor Healthcare Center, Houston area.
- Northeast Community Health Clinic, Houston area.
- Spring Branch Community Health Center, Houston area.
- Project Vida Health Center, El Paso (New Look Alike).
- Georgetown Community Clinic, Georgetown (New Look-Alike).
- Pasadena Health Center, Pasadena.
- Alvin Community Health Endeavor, Alvin.
- Midland Community Healthcare Services, Midland.
- El Centro Del Barrio, Existing FQHC, San Antonio.
- Longview Wellness Center, Longview.

FQHC New Access Point applications, submitted June 18, 2004, for rural areas:

- Cross Timbers Health Clinics, Existing FQHC applicant in De Leon (North central Texas).
- Brazos Valley Community Action Agency, Inc., Bryan.

Existing FQHCs applying for federal Expand Medical Capacity grants, submitted in fiscal year 2004:

- Community Health Services, Greenville (northeast of Dallas).
- Gateway Community Health Center, Inc., Laredo (Rio Grande Valley).
- Nuestra Clinica del Valle, Inc., Pharr (Rio Grande Valley).
- Fort Bend Family Health Center, Inc., Richmond (near Houston).
- South Plains Rural Health Services, Inc., Levelland (Panhandle near Lubbock).
- City of Austin, Community Care Services Department, Austin.

For more information, contact Connie Berry, Texas Primary Care Office, at (512) 458-7518 or e-mail connie.berry@tdh.state.tx.us <<mailto:connie.berry@tdh.state.tx.us>>.

Disease Outbreaks/Investigations



Pertussis claims second victim of year

The state's second pertussis fatality for 2004 has been reported: a 1-month-old Hispanic female who died May 10 in Region 9/10. On May 9, the baby was taken to the emergency room at Pecos County Medical Center and then transferred to Odessa Regional Hospital because of oxygen requirement, retraction, and respiratory distress. She was started on Erythromycin and Rocephin. Specimens for pertussis polymerase chain reaction (PCR) were collected May 10, and the results were finalized on May 22. A doctor in Mexico had previously seen the infant. Region 9/10 was notified of the death on May 26 and began the investigation, along with the Pecos County Health Department, of household contacts. Two have been identified, and both reported coughing since early April. *For more information, contact Rita Espinoza, Immunization Division, Surveillance and Epidemiology Program, at (512) 458-7111, ext. 1-6634, or e-mail rita.espinoza@tdh.state.tx.us.*



Biologic agent in water bottle suspected in unusual illness

Denton County officials are investigating an unusual illness, etiology unknown at this point. It is believed that a bottle of water is the cause of the illness. Denton County is sending the water to the TDH laboratory to hold until more information is available. Given the short incubation and severity of symptoms, a chemical rather than biologic agent is suspected. Denton County epidemiologists have been in contact with the Denton Police Department about this issue. Based on police interviews of the family, authorities have a high suspicion that the water contained gama hydroxybutyric acid (GHB). *For more information, contact Elizabeth Delamater, Microbiological Services Division, Bureau of Laboratories, at (512) 458-7592 or e-mail elizabeth.delamater@tdh.state.tx.us.*



Of 2,769 Texas mosquito pools analyzed, West Nile virus found in 3

West Nile season has started again. The virus has been detected in birds, mosquitoes, or horses in Brazoria, Brazos, Fort Bend, Harris, La Salle, Leon, Lubbock, Montgomery, Orange, and Taylor counties. From May 1 to June 25, 347 human samples were tested by Medical Serology; none were positive for West Nile. During the same time period, the Medical Virology lab tested 2,769 mosquito pools and isolated the virus from three pools, one each from Orange, Taylor, and Brazoria counties. Other arbovirus have also been detected: the California group virus was isolated from Fort Bend County, and two horses in Liberty County died from eastern equine encephalitis. *For more information, contact Maryann Patterson, Microbiological Services Division, Bureau of Laboratories, at (512) 458-7515 or e-mail maryann.patterson@tdh.state.tx.us.*



Deadly listeriosis cluster in South Texas under investigation

Region 11 is participating in the investigation of four confirmed cases of listeriosis in South Texas since February 2004. Two of the patients died, and one had a miscarriage. Three of the patients are known to be infected by the same genetic strain of *Listeria monocytogenes*, similar or identical to those strains infecting patients elsewhere in Texas and in other states. It is also similar to the *Listeria monocytogenes* strain involved in last year's cluster associated with consumption of queso fresco, a type of soft white cheese. At least three of the four 2004 South Texas patients reported eating queso fresco during the time when they would have contracted the infection. Details on the food history and genetic typing of the strain are still pending for the most recent patient. *For more information, contact Allison Abell, Epidemiology Response Team, at (956) 423-0130, ext. 634, or e-mail allison.abell@tdh.state.tx.us.*



Hunters warned against plague in prairie-dog towns in Dallam County

Region 1 is responding to an outbreak of plague in prairie dogs at the Rita Blanca National Grasslands in Dallam County. So far, plague has been confirmed in fleas from four sites. Other sites are suspected to have experienced plague, based on a visual inspection of the prairie-dog towns where little, if any, prairie-dog activity was observed. Hunters from multiple states have recently been frequenting the national grasslands, aiming to shoot prairie dogs. Warning posters have been placed throughout the area, and hunters are being advised to not enter a prairie-dog town. *For more information, contact James Alexander, Zoonosis Control Program, at (806) 655-7151 or e-mail james.alexander@tdh.state.tx.us.*



Legionellosis in Montgomery County residents linked to Oklahoma City hot tubs

In March, a group of about 6,000 children and parents attending a national basketball tournament for home-schooled students in Oklahoma City were exposed to *Legionella*, a bacterium that can cause Pontiac fever, or Legionnaire's disease. About 70 of the tournament attendees were Texans; of these, at least 56 sought medical attention, most of whom were residents of Montgomery County. Team members of the regional epidemiology program and the public health preparedness program collaborated with TDH Central Office, the CDC, and the Montgomery County Health Department in conducting time-sensitive disease investigations and collections of clinical specimens. The information garnered from this epidemiological investigation, corroborated by environmental samples, helped identify hot tubs at a hotel in Oklahoma City as the source of the exposure. *For more information, contact Luis Gonzalez, Epidemiology Response Team, Public Health Preparedness Program, at (713) 767-3343 or e-mail luis.gonzales@tdh.state.tx.us.*



Investigation prompted by hantavirus found in 2 Port Arthur workers

The Zoonosis Control and epidemiology response team of Region 6/5S is assisting the Port Arthur Health Department with a hantavirus investigation. Since May, two of 25 "Labor Ready" workers tested positive for the hantavirus. Specimen samples have been forwarded to the CDC for typing of viral strain. Homesite and worksite environmental assessments have been conducted on the two cases. Determination of rodent trapping at worksite and homesite is pending upon identification of the hantavirus strain. *For more information, contact Dana Beckham, Zoonosis Control Program, Region 6/5S, at (713) 767-3300 or e-mail dana.beckham@tdh.state.tx.us.*

Program Updates



Funding being finalized on FY 2005 contracts for public health preparedness

The Office of Public Health Practice and the Center for Public Health Preparedness and Response are awaiting the final guidance and award of the FY 2005 funds for public health preparedness from the CDC. OPHP will release the FY 2005 application for public health preparedness funds to the local health departments when the guidance and award are received and the funding allocation is finalized. *For more information, contact Suzanne Sparks, Office of Public Health Practice, at (512) 458-7297, or Julie Irby-Moore, Office of Public Health Practice, at (512) 458-7111, ext. 1-6539, or e-mail suzanne.sparks@tdh.state.tx.us or julie.irbymoore@tdh.state.tx.us.*



On-site quality-assurance reviews look at local public health preparedness

The Quality Assurance Program conducted an on-site review of Corpus Christi/Nueces County Public Health District's Public Health Preparedness Program on June 8-9. Preliminary findings show that the agency has made good progress in developing appropriate plans and systems for detecting and responding to a bioterrorism threat or other public health emergency. The Quality Assurance Program will continue to conduct reviews next week at San Angelo/Tom Green County Health Department. *For more information, contact Suzanne Sparks, Office of Public Health Practice, at (512) 458-7297 or e-mail suzanne.sparks@tdh.state.tx.us.*



Health Alert Network plans expansion, conducts upgrades

An RFP for expanding the Health Alert Network with the Texas Association of Community Health Centers has been submitted to TDH Procurement and Contracting Services to invite bids on a contract that would connect HAN to more than 100 TACHC clinics' private networks, also providing additional distance-learning opportunities. Recent work of the HAN staff includes:

- Discussions with Motorola about use of their two-way radios, the state's most widely used, to support communication requirements of the Strategic National Stockpile so that Public Health can tie into local-jurisdiction radio-trunking systems anywhere in the state where the SNS might be deployed.
- Revising the HAN web portal to allow secure uploads for third-quarter progress reports from local health and regional departments. Key quality-assurance staff have been prepared for the onslaught of reports.
- Reviewing widely used emergency-operation software from several vendors to determine a suitable application for public health. Such software would be used to manage the specific and unique needs related to crisis management of public health issues; it would be required to integrate and interoperate with software systems used by other state agencies. A briefing paper is being developed to assist the agency for next steps.

For more information, contact Glen Bason, Health Alert Network, at (512) 458-7111, ext. 1-6816, or e-mail glen.bason@tdh.state.tx.us.



Video news release on EPI response team seen by 1.8 million Texas viewers

A video news release produced in May by TDH External Relations was distributed May 27 via satellite feed to TV stations across the state. The video profiled the work of EPI response teams. Here's a report of usage of the news release:

- Some 1,806,996 viewers saw this video news release in 10 usages at TV stations in Houston, Lubbock, El Paso, Laredo, Weslaco, Odessa, and Harlingen.
- Equivalent advertising time (based on advertising rates for 60-second spots during newscasts in each market) would have cost \$9,360.
- The total cost to produce, stream on the TDH website, and distribute this video news release was \$7,455.

Shooting began this week of a new video news release on what the average person should know about bioterrorism preparedness. *For more information, contact Shari Perrotta, External Relations, at (512) 458-7400 or e-mail shari.perrotta@tdh.state.tx.us.*



Center for Health Statistics introduces new webpages

The Center for Health Statistics is pleased to introduce its new webpages at <http://www.tdh.state.tx.us/chs/> as a portal for comprehensive health data in Texas. The webpages will facilitate data access for all stakeholders, both inside TDH and externally. The new portal provides direct access to such popular features as Texas Health Facts

(“County Fact Sheets”), the Texas Health Data query system, and all Texas workforce information from the Health Professions Resource Center, as well as a variety of online reports published by the center. The newest addition to these is the Vital Statistics Annual Report tables, at <http://www.tdh.state.tx.us/chs/vstat/latest/anrpt.htm>. For more information, contact Mike Gilliam, Center for Health Statistics, at (512) 458-7261 or e-mail mike.gilliam@tdh.state.tx.us.



New electronic birth-registration system now in use

Phased, statewide implementation of the Bureau of Vital Statistics Texas Electronic Birth Registration system began on May 25. As of June 18, three hospitals and one local registration office are using the new system. The new system will interface with the Office of the Attorney General’s acknowledgement-of-paternity and ImmTrac registries. Since March, BVS Field Services staff have been working with staff from the Office of the Attorney General to provide statewide training to hospitals. Regional trainings in strategic locations were held in mid-June. Statewide implementation trainings are scheduled through August. Additional trainings will be offered to hospitals and local registration offices to ensure the statewide implementation plan is accomplished as of Jan. 1, 2005. For more information, contact Debra F. Owens, Bureau of Vital Statistics, at (512) 458-7366 or e-mail debra.owens@tdh.state.tx.us.



Stakeholder input sought on planned electronic death-registration system

The TDH Bureau of Vital Statistics is developing a web-enabled vital-statistics system for death registration in Texas to improve efficiency in reporting deaths to the Social Security Administration, which gave TDH a grant to develop the online system, and to the National Center for Health Statistics. Implementation will also reduce costs of data entry. The new Texas Electronic Registrar Death Registration System will be developed in collaboration with the Social Security Administration, the National Center for Health Statistics, and the National Association for Public Health Statistics and Information Systems.

An automated system will be acquired for registering deaths that occur in Texas and capturing data on deaths to Texans outside the state. This system will include a web interface for entering death information that will provide edit and validation criteria to control the quality of the data. The system will also implement measures to ensure that death data entered into the system remains confidential and protected against unlawful access. Four partnership meetings for stakeholder input have been held in June.

The third-largest registration area for U.S. deaths, Texas faces unique challenges such as dual registration of deaths with both the state and the city or county registrar; 254 counties; more than 500 local registrars, 1,000 funeral homes, and 50,000 licensed physicians; and increasing numbers of deaths to report. For more information, contact Debra F. Owens, Bureau of Vital Statistics, at (512) 458-7366 or e-mail debra.owens@tdh.state.tx.us.



Awards for Excellence in Texas School Health announced for 2003-04

In May 2004, the TDH Adolescent and School Health Program announced the 12 winners of the Awards for Excellence in Texas School Health for the 2003-04 school year.

Sponsored by the Texas Health Foundation and administered by the TDH Adolescent and School Health Program, the awards recognize schools and districts in Texas with effective initiatives to improve the health of their students, staff, and community. The Texas Pediatric Society Foundation, a recent partner in the Awards for Excellence, will be funding awards for three of the 12 winning schools and districts to recognize their success in promoting increased nutrition and physical activity among adolescents. Ten award winners will be honored in person at the Texas School Health Association Conference in January 2005, in Plano. The other two award winners will be honored at the All Well Institute in July 2005 in Camp Allen. For descriptions of the award-winning school health programs, visit www.tdh.state.tx.us/schoolhealth/awards.htm. For more information, contact Ernesto Marquez, Adolescent and School Health Program, at (512) 458-7111, ext. 1-2140, or e-mail ernesto.marquez@tdh.state.tx.us.



Low-income women granted eligibility for breast- and cervical-cancer treatment

The Breast and Cervical Cancer Prevention and Treatment Act of 2000 gives states the authority to provide Medicaid eligibility to low-income women previously not eligible under the Medicaid program. A total of 445 women were certified for Medicaid under the Texas BCCCP Treatment Act in FY 2003. As of June 10, a total of 372 women have been certified for Medicaid under the Treatment Act in FY 2004. For more information, contact Rosamaria Murillo, Breast and Cervical Cancer Program, at (512) 458-7644 or e-mail rosamaria.murillo@tdh.state.tx.us.



Texas Early Hearing Detection and Intervention moves to web-based system

The TEHDI program is in the process of migrating to a web-based information management, tracking, and referral system. Features of the system, called eSP™, include a centralized database with 24-hour, 365-day-a-year access, electronic links to screening technologies, appointment capability for follow-up and diagnosis, and customized correspondence and reports for birth facilities. By June 30, 26 birth facilities will go live with eSP™, while the remaining 170 facilities are trained in phases through October. The HIPAA-compliant system is being provided to hospitals and birthing centers that participate in the TEHDI program as an upgrade of the current system. For more information, contact Elaine Braslow, TEHDI Program, Child Wellness Division, at (512) 458-7111, ext. 1-3829, or e-mail elaine.braslow@tdh.state.tx.us.



Licenses issued and renewed via Texas Online Project

The regulatory programs of the Associateship for Consumer Health Protection continue to participate in the Texas Online Project for the online renewal of occupational and facility licenses, as mandated by Senate Bill 1152 (78th Regular Session.) More than 100 license types are divided into tiers, for both license renewal and original license issuance. The first tier of renewals went live during May 2004. More than 125,000 license holders of the Professional Licensing and Certification Division, the Bureau of Emergency Management, the Industrial Radiographer Certification Program, and the Abusable Volatile Chemical Sales Permit Program may now renew their licenses online and pay renewal fees by credit card or electronic check. The second tier of renewals is in development, and the tier of renewals is under configuration. The overall implementation is projected to be complete in August 2005. For more information, contact Jim Zukowski, Bureau of Licensing and Compliance, at (512) 834-4503 or e-mail jim.zukowski@tdh.state.tx.us.



Emergency-response drill held at nuclear facility

Sixty-nine technical and administrative personnel from the Bureau of Radiation Control participated June 21-23 in a nuclear emergency-response drill at the South Texas Nuclear Facility outside Bay City. The drill will prepare staff for participation in a full-scale nuclear emergency-response exercise to be held in August, which will be graded by the Federal Emergency Management Agency. The South Texas Project reimburses the Department's actual expenses incurred for the exercise annually. *For more information, contact Alice Rogers, Compliance and Inspection Division, at (512) 834-6629 or e-mail alice.rogers@tdh.state.tx.us.*



Staff article on neural-tube defects to be published in national magazine

Another article based on data from the Texas Neural Tube Defect Project, "Dietary Nitrites, Nitrates, Notrosatable Drugs, and Neural Tube Defects," co-authored by Marilyn Felkner, an epidemiologist in the Infectious Disease Epidemiology and Surveillance Division, will be published in *Epidemiology*. In other news, a graduate research intern from Texas State University's Health Services assisted in the development of a database that allows utility-specific water-quality information from the Texas Commission on Environmental Quality to be examined as a risk factor for disease. *For more information, contact Marilyn Felkner, Infectious Disease Epidemiology and Surveillance Division, at (512) 458-7676 or e-mail marilyn.felkner@tdh.state.tx.us.*



Hepatitis C poster and brochures developed

Hepatitis C Initiative staff have developed a poster, *Know Hepatitis C: Know the Facts, Not the Fears*, to help raise awareness of the disease among employers. The poster is available as a PDF for viewing and downloading from the IDEAS website in its webpages on the Hepatitis C Initiative. Also completed are text updates and a redesign of two brochures, *Hepatitis B Can Be Prevented!* and *Hepatitis C Can Be Prevented!* The brochures will be printed and available as PDFs for viewing and downloading from the IDEAS website. *For more information, contact Gary Heseltine, Infectious Disease Epidemiology and Surveillance Division, at (512) 458-7676 or e-mail gary.heseltine@tdh.state.tx.us.*



Matching Texas cancer records with national deaths can produce survival statistics

The Texas Cancer Registry is preparing a submission to the National Death Index at the National Center for Health Statistics for matching Texas cancer records with death records from all 50 states. Texas cancer records will then be updated with information on vital status and cause of death, enabling us to produce cancer-survival statistics. This also will allow cancer registries and facilities accredited by the American College of Surgeons to conduct required follow-up on their patients. *For more information, contact Melanie Williams, Cancer Registry Division, at (512) 458-7111, ext. 1-3633, or e-mail melanie.williams@tdh.state.tx.us.*



Cost recovery under way to secure unreported cancer data from hospitals

The Texas Cancer Registry continued cost-recovery procedures for securing unreported cancer data for the years 2001 and 2002 from five non-compliant hospitals in the Corpus Christi area. Cancer Registry staff completed a review to identify unreported cases and

are currently abstracting and coding the information for reporting to the TCR. Failure of these hospitals to report cancer data as required by law has resulted in incomplete and poor quality of data for this region, affecting cancer-cluster investigations and other data analyses for this area. *For more information, contact Velma Garza, Cancer Registry Division, at (512) 458-7111, ext. 1-3635, or e-mail velma.garza@tdh.state.tx.us.*



Provisional approval granted to certain HIV Medication Program clients

On May 7, the Texas HIV Medication Program instituted a process change in eligibility to decrease the number of clients whose application status is “pending” for lack of information regarding current/most recent employment status. Eligibility processing time was about six weeks for a complete program application. To expedite the process and remove clients from “pending approval” status, THMP management allowed clients with applications lacking information “on last employment only” to be put on the program on a provisional 30-day status. Staff performing eligibility functions will first attempt to obtain the information by phone from the client or the client’s case manager. If unsuccessful, they will then send the client a letter stating that the client is being put on the program on a provisional status for 30 days pending receipt of where and when last employed. This information may be faxed, called in, or mailed to the program. The immediate effect of the process change was to provide provisional approval to 29 clients. *For more information, contact Debra Seaman, HIV/STD Comprehensive Preventive Services Division, at (512) 490-2505, ext. 2629, or e-mail debra.seamans@tdh.state.tx.us.*



National HIV Testing Day

The annual observance of National HIV Testing Day took place on June 27. The HIV/STD Training and Public Education Branch is facilitating communication about the event among staff at the San Antonio Metropolitan Health District, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, and the Department of Health and Human Services. The HIV/STD Training and Public Education Branch is compiling a list of events around the state that were related to National HIV Testing Day. The list will be sent out in a *Texas HIV/STD E-Update* e-mail bulletin in June. A news release about the day’s events was also sent out. *For more information, contact Debra Seaman, HIV/STD Comprehensive Preventive Services Division, at (512) 490-2505, ext. 2629 or e-mail debra.seamans@tdh.state.tx.us.*

Meetings, Conferences, and Trainings



Texas Comprehensive Women’s Health Initiative holds trainings, meetings

In the second year of the Texas Comprehensive Women’s Health Initiative’s three-year grant from the Health Resources and Services Administration, key activities included monthly Women’s Health Network meetings and focus groups conducted in the two pilot sites, El Paso and Harlingen, to gather information about the current status of women’s health-care service delivery. This data will serve as a baseline for the work in the third year of the grant.

Training in June was conducted for Women’s Health Network members, their colleagues, TDH staff from El Paso and Harlingen, Healthy Start staff, and other partners. The

training, “Head, Heart, and Hands: A Community Collaboration and Planning Workshop,” addressed team-building, facilitation, conflict resolution, and strategic planning. A train-the-trainer session was held in May in conjunction with the Family Violence Prevention Fund to facilitate the integration of domestic-violence screening into routine health care and social-service activities. In the next month, a part-time staff person is expected to be hired in each of the pilot areas to initiate the work of ensuring a comprehensive women’s health-care delivery system at the local level. *For more information, contact Chan McDermott, Bureau of Women’s Health, at (512) 458-7796 or e-mail chan.mcdermott@tdh.state.tx.us.*



Texas Cancer Registry in partnership with academic centers

Staff of the Texas Cancer Registry have held discussions with the Texas A&M School of Rural Public Health, the University of Texas Medical Branch at Galveston, and the M.D. Anderson Cancer Center about partnering to gain additional resources for achieving national gold certification for the Texas Cancer Registry. Commitments have been received for the funding of a certified tumor registrar to serve as a circuit-rider abstractor in order to help collect cancer reports for a selected 16-county area (UTMB), for two certified tumor registrars to code and process cancer records in backlog (M.D. Anderson), and for potential cost-sharing to establish a regional cancer registry in the border region (A&M). *For more information, contact Nancy Weiss, Cancer Registry Division, at (512) 458-7111, ext. 1-3603, or e-mail nancy.weiss@tdh.state.tx.us.*



Minority Health videoconference to highlight congressional minority caucus

Members of the congressional minority caucus will be featured at this year’s University of North Carolina School of Public Health Videoconference on Minority Health. The conference is scheduled for June 21-24 and will be broadcast via satellite to TDH staff in Room T607. The TDH broadcast is coordinated by the Office of Minority Health. Each day’s broadcast begins at 12:30 p.m. and ends at 3:30 p.m. This year’s conference marks the 10th anniversary of the program. *For more information, contact Mary Soto, Office of Public Health Practice, at (512) 458-7111, ext. 6559, or e-mail mary.soto@tdh.state.tx.us.*



Jailers get TDH presentation on Methicillin-resistant ‘Staphylococcus aureus’

On May 25-26, Neil Pascoe gave two presentations on infection control and Methicillin-resistant *Staphylococcus aureus* to more than 190 correctional staff at the Texas Jail Association conference in San Antonio. Attendees learned in their practice settings. *For more information, contact Neil Pascoe, Infectious Disease Epidemiology and Surveillance Division, at (512) 458-7676 or e-mail neil.pascoe@tdh.state.tx.us.*



TB funding work group meets

The TB Elimination Division hosted a meeting of the TB funding work group in Austin on June 23-24 to discuss issues related to the allocation of funding among TB programs in Texas. Discussions will continue on the criteria for the allocation of state and federal grant funds to local and regional TB programs. *For more information, contact Charles Wallace, TB Elimination Division, at (512) 458-7447 or e-mail charles.wallace@tdh.state.tx.us.*



Binational forums held on public health preparedness and response

Since mid-March, TDH staff, in cooperation with the Mexican Ministry of Health (Secretaria de Salud de Mexico-SSA), and the U.S.-Mexico Border Health Commission have produced a series of Texas-Mexico Public Health Preparedness and Response forums. The purpose of these forums has been to gain a better understanding of the Texas and Mexico preparedness and response plans as well as to enhance partnerships for the improved coordination of response to health and safety issues along the Texas-Mexico border. Forums have been held in Ciudad Juarez, Piedras Negras, Ciudad Acuña, Mexico and Laredo, Texas. The final two forums will be in Brownsville on July 15-16 and in Ojinaga, Mexico, on July 29-30. *For more information, contact Luis Morales, TDH External Relations, at (512) 458-7111, ext. 1-6394, or e-mail luis.morales@tdh.state.tx.us.*



Rotary International learns about TB prevention

The TB Elimination Division hosted a meeting of district governors from several Rotary International Districts in Texas and Mexico on May 28 at TDH in Austin. General information about tuberculosis was presented, and strategies for involvement of local Rotary Clubs in tuberculosis prevention activities were discussed. For the first year of this project, Rotary International will focus on raising awareness of club members about the status of tuberculosis prevention and control along the Texas-Mexico border. *For more information, contact Charles Wallace, TB Elimination Division, at (512) 458-7447 or e-mail charles.wallace@tdh.state.tx.us.*

Regional Updates

Region 1



Progressive Farm Health and Safety Day Camp to welcome migrant children

Region 1 is finalizing plans for the Progressive Farm Health and Safety Day Camp, scheduled for July for migrant children, ages 8-13, from Castro, Hale, Lamb, and Floyd counties. The children will be selected through the Texas Migrant Council's Head Start program and the school district's summer-migrant programs. Transportation to the camp will be provided by the Texas Migrant Council and the school district. Children will learn about first aid, chemical safety, sun safety and hydration, and grain and cotton safety, and they will participate in a session on alcohol education. *For more information, contact Tricia Vowels, EPSDT Program, at (806) 767-0414 or e-mail tricia.vowels@tdh.state.tx.us.*

Region 2/3



Mass-vaccination exercise prepares officials for possible smallpox event

Region 2/3 and the Collin County Health Department, conducted the Regional Smallpox Vaccination Clinic exercise on June 9. This state-sponsored exercise was facilitated by the Texas Engineering Extension Service and held in McKinney. Nearly 600 public health and emergency-management officials from all corners of Texas attended and participated as patients and/or caregivers.

The exercise was based on *Mass Dispensing Clinic Operations for Smallpox*, a guide published March 4 by Region 2/3 that incorporated directions from the CDC for mass-vaccination clinics in the event of a smallpox incident. This baseline instruction is written for local modification in which the local health authority adjusts clinic operations to accommodate the required “through-put” of patients, facility capability, and available staff. The exercise provided for a wide range of patients, including those with contraindications due to immuno-compromise, exposure to smallpox, pregnancy, being underage, and a number of other conditions designed to test the clinic processes. The exercise clinic was staffed at eight stations, theoretically capable of vaccinating 240 patients per hour, or 24,000 patients in 100 hours. *For more information, contact James Zoretic, Regional Director, at (817) 264-4501 or e-mail james.zoretic@tdh.state.tx.us.*



Health coalitions developed in rural counties

The Public Health Improvement Team has helped 10 rural counties develop three active coalitions:

- The Fannin Health Partnership was formed from a health forum developed by local elected officials and the Public Health Improvement Team. This partnership is currently assessing the needs of the county through the Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance Survey and a face-to-face assessment developed by Texas A&M University at Commerce. The partnership hopes to develop a community health-improvement plan for Fannin County.
- The Mesquite Plains Rural Health Network is a coalition comprised of the five hospitals and one nursing facility in Fisher, Jones, Kent, and Stonewall counties, as well as TDH. The network is working collaboratively to address the health status of local residents.
- The Rural Health Partnership, comprised of representatives from Baylor, Foard, Haskell, Knox, and Throckmorton counties, has also been formed as a coalition to address regional needs.

For more information, contact Susan Senn, Public Health Improvement Team, at (817) 264-4561 or e-mail susan.senn@tdh.state.tx.us.



Team works to help counties establish local health authorities

The Public Health Improvement Team is working with rural counties to establish local health authorities in their communities. During the past year, the Public Health Improvement Team has worked with elected officials in six counties within Region 2/3 to establish a local health authority as well as assisting three other counties to re-appoint local health authorities. *For more information, contact Susan Senn, Public Health Improvement Team, at (817) 264-4561 or e-mail susan.senn@tdh.state.tx.us.*

Region 4/5 North



Planning teams preparing for Future Search conferences (GOAL INFO TK)

The Nacogdoches County Future Search Conference, scheduled for Nov. 9-11, will provide an opportunity to discuss community-health issues and to prioritize solutions to those issues. Its planning team consists of more than 30 members from more than 15 organizations and from numerous Region 4/5 North programs. The Houston and Trinity Counties Future Search Conference, set for Sept. 20-22, has a planning team of more than 22 members from more than 12 organizations and numerous Region 4/5 North programs. Both planning teams have met monthly and bi-monthly since their conception in January of 2004. Both have designed their own letterhead, acquired postage, snacks, drinks, and door prizes, and are developing their databases for participant-invitation lists. *For more information, contact Vicki Colston, Community Health Program, at (903) 533-5223 or e-mail vicki.colston@tdh.state.tx.us.*



New Public Health Laboratory of East Texas dedicated June 9

The new Public Health Laboratory of East Texas, a joint effort between TDH and the University of Texas Health Center at Tyler, was dedicated June 9. A campus building was remodeled to house several diagnostic labs, including a Biosafety Level 2 lab, a Biosafety Level 3 lab, and associated offices. The Biosafety Level 3 diagnostic laboratory has special safety features, including an air-handling system, which will enable the safe analysis of bacteria such as anthrax and other microbes that cause dangerous and infectious diseases. Most of the lab's work will be testing and diagnosing infectious diseases, as well as meeting other public health needs in the 35 counties that make up TDH Region 4/5 North. In the fall of 2001, TDH decided to upgrade its public health lab system to ensure that it would have the capacity to identify and analyze potential bioterrorism agents, as well as to quickly respond to other public health emergencies. The East Texas lab is the newest of 10 public health labs around the state equipped to safely conduct such specialized diagnosis and analysis. David Lakey, M.D., medical director of the Center for Pulmonary and Infectious Disease Control at the Health Center, will be the medical director of the new lab. *For more information, contact Paul K. McGaha, Regional Director, at (903) 533-5230 or e-mail paul.mcgaha@tdh.state.tx.us.*

Region 6/5 South



Betz named as acting regional director

Region 6/5 South welcomes Thomas G. Betz, M.D., M.P.H., to Houston. Dr. Betz has been at the Region since June 1 and will be the acting regional director until a regional director is hired for Region 6/5 South. Dr. Betz has served in several positions during his tenure at TDH and is continuing as the physician director for the region's Infectious Disease Epidemiology and Surveillance Division. *For further information, contact Thomas Betz, Region 6/5, at (512) 458-7111, ext. 7676, or e-mail tom.betz@tdh.state.tx.us.*

Region 7



Local health department volunteers trained to use Vectest kit for West Nile virus

During April and May, Region 7 Zoonosis Control developed a testing protocol and trained volunteers from the local health department to test birds for West Nile virus, using the Vectest kit. Site visits were made to health departments in Brazos, Hays, McLennan, and Travis counties and kits, paid for by federal WNV funds, were provided to them. As a result of the training, the first WNV-positive bird in Central Texas was confirmed during late May by the Brazos County Health Department. For the first time, diagnostic results are available within hours because this test can be performed at the local level. *For more information, contact Beverlee E. Nix, Zoonosis Control Program, at (254) 778-6744, ext. 2451 or e-mail beverlee.nix@tdh.state.tx.us.*



Lecture gives veterinarians information on rabies and West Nile virus

The Region 7 Zoonosis Control veterinarian addressed the Brazos Valley Veterinary Medical Association at its meeting in Navasota on May 4. She spoke on the impact of the West Nile virus on Texas and on the current animal rabies epizootic in Brazos County. The goal of the lecture was to provide veterinary practitioners with the latest information on WNV statistics, diagnostics, and prevention methods as well to provide information on rabies data and rabies law. The rules on how to handle animals exposed to rabid animals were reviewed in detail, so practitioners will be able to guide their clients through the process. *For more information, contact Beverlee E. Nix, Zoonosis Control Program, at (254) 778-6744, ext. 2451 or e-mail beverlee.nix@tdh.state.tx.us.*



Three school districts added to Texas Vaccines for Children program

Although school is out for the summer, Region 7's immunization specialist is working to enroll more independent school districts in the Texas Vaccines for Children program; three will be added in the fall of 2004. These new participants will attend Region 7's eight-hour Immunization Workshop for Health-Care Professionals. If school personnel

request a hands-on clinical rotation, the public health nurse provides the training environment. For those school districts that cannot find a local physician to sign their standing delegation orders, the Region 7 director has agreed to accept that responsibility, once district personnel have completed the training. Additional quarterly quality assurance is conducted on those districts under the regional director's medical authority.

For more information, contact Lynn Ponsonby, Immunizations Program, at (254) 778-6744 or e-mail lynn.ponsonby@tdh.state.tx.us



Train-the-trainer workshop held on immunization

Region 7 staff conducted the third annual train-the-trainer workshop on Immunization Training for Health-Care Professionals to 14 personnel from Regions 1 and 4/5 as well as five of the seven regional local health departments. The training consisted of three days of instruction on presentation skills, workshop materials, and resources. The course prepares other regions and local health department personnel to conduct the eight-hour workshop on quality clinical immunization services to private providers and to WIC and local health department personnel. *For more information, contact Lynn Ponsonby, Immunizations Program, at (254) 778-6744 or e-mail lynn.ponsonby@tdh.state.tx.us*

Region 9/10



Annual meeting of U.S.-Mexico Border Health Association co-sponsored by TDH

Serving as president of the U.S.-Mexico Border Health Association, the director of Region 9/10, Miguel Escobedo, M.D., participated in and helped co-sponsor the association's 62nd annual meeting, "Health, Equity, and Social Development," held June 8-11 in El Paso and Juarez. Tom Betz, M.D., acting director of Region 6/5 South, joined numerous academic presenters of topics including domestic violence, disease prevention and control, diabetes prevalence on the border, emerging and re-emerging diseases, and health initiatives for youth. *For more information, contact Miguel A. Escobedo, Regional Director, at (915) 834-7675 or e-mail miguel.escobedo@tdh.state.tx.us.*



Sister cities along border participate in Binational Public Health Week

Regional staff participated in a Binational Public Health Week in April to promote health-prevention activities. An overview of health disparities was presented by faculty members of the Public Health School at UT-El Paso, and the Region 9/10 exhibited a much appreciated display showing the history of public health in the region since the early 1900s. Health-promotion and training activities took place in the sister cities of El Paso and Ciudad Juárez and in Presidio and Ojinaga. *For more information, contact Blanca Serrano, Office of Border Health, at (915) 834-7690 or e-mail blanca.serrano@tdh.state.tx.us.*



El Paso Information Forum on oral health coordinated

The regional office helped coordinate the El Paso Information Forum for state oral health services, held April 15. More than 75 participants offered information on best options to improve oral health in West Texas and along the border. TDH was represented by Miguel A. Escobedo, M.D., and Linda Altenhoff. *For more information, contact Miguel A. Escobedo, Regional Director, at (915) 834-7675 or e-mail miguel.escobedo@tdh.state.tx.us.*



TDH advises newly created Health Disparities Research Institute at UT-El Paso

The regional director participated in a Health Disparities Research Institute advisory meeting, offering advice on funding priorities and overall direction. The Research Institute was recently instituted at the University of Texas at El Paso. The mission is to conduct and promote innovative research in health disparities. *For more information, contact Miguel A. Escobedo, Regional Director, at (915) 834-7680 or e-mail miguel.escobedo@tdh.state.tx.us.*

Region 11



Operation Lone Star to include Texas Medical Rangers for first time

Region 11 is preparing for the sixth annual Operation Lone Star. This year's event will be held from July 25 to Aug. 6, with Region 11 as the lead for civilians and the Texas Army National Guard as the lead for the military side. Field clinics in Starr, Hidalgo, and Cameron counties will provide general medical and dental care to indigent residents. The Texas Medical Rangers are expected to participate for the first time. More than 30,000 patients have been treated in the previous five years of Operation Lone Star. *For more information, contact Brian R. Smith, Regional Director, at (956) 423-0130, ext. 504, or e-mail brian.smith@tdh.state.tx.us.*